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Sermon Title: Are you sitting comfortably?

Bible Reference: Hebrews 11

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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**First Sunday of 2018**

**‘Are you sitting comfortably?’ Hebrews 11**

It feels a little late to do a NY message, feels like the year is well and truly underway and everything is back to normal! But there is something I feel the Lord has laid on my heart for to us as we start this year – a message of great encouragement and help.

We wish one another a ‘*Happy New Year’,* but what is needed for our year to be ‘happy’, to be peaceful, for us to be contented or whatever else we think constitutes a happy year?

We may think of it in terms of what we hope we won’t experience - things like sadness, pain, illness, grief, anxiety, worry or whatever. But in truth the likelihood is that these things will actually be part of our life and they may very well dominate it as we live in frail bodies in a broken world.

So if those things are almost inevitable what can be done to counter it? What can be done to enable us to experience peace and contentment and even joy and happiness regardless of the circumstances? Is it even possible?

Yes, you bet it is for us as Christians! We have been rescued and given life to the full, an abundant, vibrant life, a life that thrives and not just survives. Not because we avoid or are immune to the trials of life but because as God says in **Rom** **8:37-38** *‘In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us’*. He’s saying that regardless of our circumstances we are victors not victims.

This victorious life is possible, it is there for us. Yet, if we’re honest too often we have to admit that we don’t feel like we have abundant life – we’re happy just to get through another day, another week without breaking up.

What’s the answer? What can be done? The answer is surprisingly simple! Our experience and enjoyment of being an overcomer this year will be proportionate to the measure to our **faith** in our **God**.

I posted on F/B a few weeks ago a quote from R C Sproul (great Bible teacher who died last year). He used to compare faith to a chair. If you have a chair you don’t just talk about it, you sit on it! Faith, said Sproul, is like the chair – no good talking about it if you don’t use it! In other words, you trust it, you let it take your weight.

If you are to *experience* the benefits of being God’s child this year instead of just *believing* in them – the benefit of peace, of blessing, if we are to see the promises fulfilled then we have to sit down on him and let him take the weight! Or to use another Bible picture – to step out of the boat in faith on the words of our saviour.

In effect it comes down to whether we really think he’s able to do what he says he will do, or will we let fear dominate. George Muller once said: The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety. Fear and faith are opposites and cannot easily coexist with each other! Where there is fear faith is absent – we care called to live by faith, not fear!

And **Hebrews 11** is a roll call of people who trusted God, who took him at his word and as a result were overcomers. They didn’t let fear dominate. That’s not to say it was easy and they never struggled (don’t be too idealistic about this!) – but at the end of the day they said ‘Yes to God’ and put their feet over the side of the boat and walked in faith; or they pulled up the seat and sat on it!

Faith, says the writer of Hebrews, ‘*believes that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*’. Do you really believe that God exists and rewards/honours/comes up with the goods for those who trust him? Hebrews was written to people who were sometimes tempted to give up so writer reminds them of the track record of those who overcame fear/discouragement/temptation/trouble with faith.

* **Noah** - built a boat in the middle of a desert before anyone had even heard of ‘rain’. But he believed God and as a result escaped the flood when it came.
* **Abraham** – knew little of God but took him at his word and embarked on a journey with all his family which ended up in a new country with a new family and a new promise.
* **Sarah** believed God and as a result had a child in her old age
* The **Israelites** said trusted God and saw the walls of Jericho fall down without a shot being fired
* **Rahab** trusted God and escaped with her life
* **Moses** trusted God enough to walk out on a position and power – to align himself with a despised group of people – ended up as his nation’s greatest leader!
* **Gideon, David and Daniel** all trusted God and saw the impossible happen over and over again.

None of these were perfect, all had huge faults and failings, but in trusting Him and saying yes to God saw Him do mighty things.

* Others trusted God and became overcomers in very different situations – they trust God and overcame said yes to God and endured the impossible. Some overcame suffering, pain, ridicule, prison, rejection, isolation and even death – because they believed God’s promise of something better still to come.

Faith in God doesn’t exempt us from the trials of life, but it does alter the way we look at them, it does change our attitudes towards them.

So this year, as every year, our happiness and peace and contentment depends to a large part on our attitude and our trust in God. Trust or fear? The two cannot coexist – they are opposites – one will dominate.

**But in case this seems hard and very much focused on me and on what I have to do consider** let me direct you as we finish to the one we trust, the one who we’re resting on. The God who has revealed and shown himself in history to be:

* God the creator – power and wisdom
* God the holy, just and fair one – never unfair, always right, no mistakes
* God the faithful one – always, always keeps his promises
* God the loving one – loves enough to become one of us, to die for us. ‘He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Rom 8:32’
* God the in control, sovereign one – whole of Bible story shows this! Control of nations, rulers, empires and who has a plan for the end as well.

This is the God that gave you a new heart/nature when he saved you and who adopted you into his family, who calls you his child.

This is the God who has given you many, many wonderful and precious promises. promised you so many, many things. Promises to watch over you, care for you, protect you, guide you, keep you; promises to hold you up when things are tough, promises never to leave you or forsake you, promises to work in every situation for your good and promises to ensure that you make it safe into heaven.

These promises are all yours – like a preloaded gift card, ready and waiting to be used. No use if we don’t bank them – if we don’t put them to work. He wants us to take him at his word.

Some our problem is that we spent too much time looking at, thinking about at what we don’t have, or might lose and not enough time looking at and treasuring what we do have and cannot lose. Jim Elliot – missionary who gave his life for Jesus, ‘*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*’

You really don’t have to worry what the future may hold when you know the one who holds the future!

This year get to know God, look at him, read his word, look at what it says about him and believe it. Believe it, trust him and step out and test him and discover for yourself the joy of sitting on the chair. Focus on him and his desires and purposes and plans and you will not be disappointed and you’ll find that you will have the contented, satisfied year that you hope for.